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The American Indian and Alaska Native Urban Population

Keywords:

- Relocation
- Assimilation,
- De-Tribalization
- Indian Center,
- Pan-Indian
- Supra-Tribal

Description: Federal policies, which encouraged individuals from the AIAN population to move to urban centers, created a sense of isolation and desperation in the urban AIAN population. However, this despair created unity and helped to foster the emergence of a pan-Indian, or supra-tribal, identity.

Key Points:

1. The 2010 Census illustrates the growing diversity among the American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) population.
2. During the 1950s the federal government implemented policies to relocate AIAN from reservations to urban areas and promote assimilation.
3. Loss of tribal identity and social alienation led many member of the AIAN population to develop psychological issues such as depression and alcoholism.
4. The creation of Indian Centers in urban areas helped to fortify a pan-Indian identity, which dissolved barriers between tribes.
5. In recent years Indian Centers and other pan-Indian organizations have worked to combat the social and economic issues faced by the AIAN community throughout the nation.

Issue Brief:

According to the 2010 Census, which collects data from all individuals living in the nation, American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) “refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment.”¹ The data collected by the Census Bureau presents an image of the population, which can illustrate important

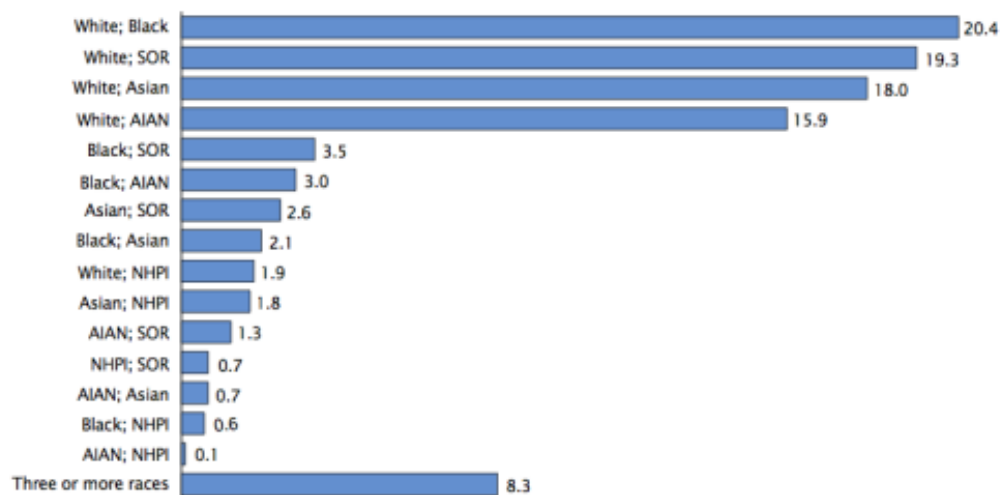
¹ 2010 Census

population trends. The 2010 Census highlighted the growing racial diversification of the American population, a trend *that* was particularly evident in regards to the AIAN population. 2.9 million individuals identified as themselves as solely AIAN while 2.3 million identified as being AIAN in combination with one or more other races; therefore a total of 5.2 million individuals identified as AIAN alone or in combination. Although the AIAN population comprises only 1.7% of the total United States population, it is increasing at a faster rate than any other race. The diversity of the population is increasing along with its size; the number of individuals who identified as AIAN in combination with one or more other races is growing at a faster rate than the AIAN group alone. Furthermore, most of the AIAN population lives outside of tribal areas; 78% of the AIAN population, AIAN alone-or-in-combination, and 92% of the AIAN in combination population lived outside of AIAN tribal areas.²

Figure 3.

Percentage Distribution of People Who Reported Multiple Races: 2010

(For more information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/pl94-171.pdf)



Note: People reporting multiple races represented 2.9 percent of the total population. Black refers to Black or African American; AIAN refers to American Indian and Alaska Native; NHPI refers to Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; SOR refers to Some Other Race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table P1.

² 2010 Census

The federal government “has recognized the right of Indian tribes to self-govern. Indian tribes exercise inherent sovereign powers over their members and tribal lands.”³ Although the current relationship between the government and the AIAN tribes is based upon respect, previous relationships were hostile. The federal government has enacted policies to discriminate against the AIAN population throughout history; however, these policies have also led to the diversification of the AIAN population.



Tiger Woods is one of many Americans who identifies as multiracial. He is 1/4 African American, 1/4 Chinese, 1/4 Thai, 1 Dutch and 1/8 Native American⁴

In 1953 “Congress enforced full assimilation of Indians into American society, including ‘relocation’ from reservations to cities.”⁵ The federal government promoted integration in order to exterminate traditional tribal life. “Indian society began

³ Consultation Handbook

⁴ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/golf/article-2154363/Tiger-Woods-world-ranking-fourth.html>

⁵ Peter Katel & Charles S. Clark, *American Indians” Issues in Race and Ethnicity, 6th Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press/Sage Publications, 2013).

urbanizing in 1951, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) started urging reservation dwellers to move to cities where — it was hoped — they would blend into the American “melting pot” and find more economic opportunity and a better standard of living.”⁶

Furthermore, the BIA created Indian Centers in Urban areas in order to promote assimilation by de-tribalizing indigenous people. However, the lack of federal assistance, particularly in regards to healthcare, combined with the disintegration of tribal identity created despair among the AIAN population. The economic pressure was increased by the drastic change in environment; individuals not only needed to adjust to a new economic system, but they had to do so while adapting to a completely new culture with drastically different values. The combination of these pressures coupled with the common sense of separation led many members of the AIAN population to develop psychological issues such as alcoholism and depression. However, this shared feeling of isolation prompted bonding among the AIAN urban population and helped to dissolve barriers between the tribes. The Indian Centers encouraged the AIAN population to view themselves as a community and not as members of discrete tribes. Ultimately, a pan tribal, or supra-tribal, identity has emerged among the indigenous population living in urban areas.

Indian Centers and other pan-Indian organizations have worked to combat the social and economic issues, particularly relating to healthcare and education, faced by the AIAN community. The Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) and the National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC) are two examples of groups that represent the AIAN population on the supra-tribal level. The UIHI was founded in 1996 in order “to support

⁶ Katel & Clark, 101.

the health and well-being of urban Indian communities through information, scientific inquiry, and technology.”⁷ The NUIFC, created in 2003, advocates for urban, Indian families by fostering cooperation between tribes and other organizations that represent the AIAN population and researching the particular issues that pertain to these individuals. The NUIFC works to build “a network of urban American Indian Organizations to strengthen urban American Indian families by reinforcing cultural identity, education, and healthy families while respectfully working to harmoniously bridge the gap between tribal governments and other American Indian institutions.”⁸ The ultimate goal of the NUIFC is “to strengthen the voices of urban American Indian peoples and their access to resources.”⁹



NATIONAL URBAN INDIAN FAMILY COALITION

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Relevant Websites:

- Americans for Indian Opportunity
<http://www.aio.org>
- The National Urban Indian Family Coalition
<http://nuifc.org>
- The Urban Indian Health Institute
<http://www.uihi.org>

⁷ Urban Indian Health Institute

⁸ National Urban Indian Family Coalition

⁹ National Urban Indian Family Coalition

¹⁰ National Urban Indian Family Coalition

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